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SUBJECT: DILI REMAINS CALM, BUT THOUSANDS STILL DISPLACED AS RUMORS
ABOUND

REF: A) DILI 193 B) DILI 192

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11. Summary: The situation in Dili was relatively calm last night, but there were still several disturbances reported, including shots fired in two Dili neighborhoods, reported clashes in the hills outside of Dili, and fighting at one of the major markets. There was another fight between groups of youths reported today, but otherwise the city was calm. The Government announced that law and order enforcement is now solely the responsibility of the police (PNTL), but some military presence still remains in the city and vicinity. There are concerns that the military (FDTL) may still be carrying out search and seizure operations, although a senior military official denies this. Obtaining accurate information on detentions, injuries, and deaths has been difficult, with official sources stating that there are between two and five confirmed deaths, while rumors are circulating of much higher numbers. Official accounts also state that 86 people have been detained to date. Information on the whereabouts of the 595 dismissed soldiers is elusive, though a number are said to have returned to their homes or seeking to turn themselves in to the police, and others are known to be in hiding. A large number of people are still taking refuge away from their homes, including several thousand in Church facilities. All 200 of the U.S. Embassy employees and family members who had taken refuge last night on the Embassy compound had left by the end of today. Although the climate of fear seemed to be subsiding during the day, at nightfall reports of fears regarding possible attacks or actions planned for the evening began to proliferate. End summary.

Situation much calmer overnight, but some incidents reported

12. The situation in Dili and vicinity was mostly calm last night (Saturday, April 29), but with a few violent incidents reported.

There was one report around 11 pm of gunfire heard in the neighborhood near the Pertamina Pier (in the vicinity of the Embassy) which was attributed to gang activity. Near the airport, in the Comoro area adjacent to Tasi Tolu, there was one report of gunfire and of a gunshot injury confirmed this morning. The injured man was reportedly an ex-FDTL "petitioner" who had been shot by an active duty FDTL member. Sources also reported that gunfire was heard intermittently in the hills outside of Dili just south of Tasitolu where some of the petitioners are believed to have fled. The Comoro Market was

also reported to have seen some fighting overnight, and in the morning Emboff observed that the entrance to the market was blockaded. However, through most of the rest of Dili, there were no reports of disturbances and the overall volume of reported clashes and shooting was significantly down.

13. During the day (Sunday, April 30) there were no incidents reported, except that Government sources reported a fight between two gangs of youths in Tasitolu that was broken up by FDTL. According to a statement by Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta, the youths "were happy to accept the mediation of FDTL." The city was calmer than it had been since the beginning of the riot early Friday afternoon. More commercial establishments reopened and an increased number of people appearing to be going about their usual business. However, a large number of stores and vendor stalls still remain closed and the markets, usually a center of activity, were mostly closed down. Embassy staff who drove through various neighborhoods of the city found major markets completely deserted and many neighborhoods involved in the violence eerily quiet, dark, and emptied of their inhabitants. The road to Tasitolu, the main thoroughfare leading to the western areas of the country, was opened to civilian traffic during the day and some traffic was moving in and out of the western end of the city. For the most part, however, the majority of residents in this area are already in shelters in other areas of Dili, and the few visitors to the suburb were foreign diplomatic and aid officials. Embassy officers reported spotting at least 20 houses along the main road in Tasitolu which had been burned to the ground and many vendors' stalls were also looted and destroyed. Official roadblocks had been removed, although tires and rocks still obstructed portions of the road and the debris from burned cars lined portions of the route. The area appeared largely unpatrolled by either police or military forces, although late in the day PNTL patrols replaced the FDTL patrols that had been in place for the previous 48 hours.

Army officially no longer involved in law enforcement, but still

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present

14. A press release from the office of Foreign Minister Jose Ramos-Horta last night announced that high-level Government, military and police leaders had decided that as of today "FDTL [army] units will be completely withdrawn from Dili and surrounding areas and will be deployed elsewhere." Another press release this afternoon stated that law enforcement activities had been transferred back to the exclusive responsibility of the national police (PNTL), although military police would continue their "normal" patrolling. Embassy staff observed that during the morning the FDTL remained in charge in the Tasitolu and Comoro areas and a noticeable FDTL presence remained during the afternoon. By early evening, however, Embassy officers observed that FDTL had largely vacated these areas and PNTL officers were seen sporadically in these neighborhoods.

15. Subsequently, late this afternoon, the Embassy's Defense Cooperation Chief met with Lieutenant Commander Falur, who has been in charge of the FDTL operations. He stated that the FDTL has now shifted to "Phase II operations". He explained that "Phase I" was the operation to contain, control, and detain rioting demonstrators while "Phase II" is focused on maintaining a visible presence in several (unspecified) locations around town. Under Phase II, he continued, the FDTL will not actively engage in operations, but will be on standby to render assistance to PNTL as required. Embassy staff in the Tasitolu area as well as other areas where FDTL had previously had a heavy presence observed almost no FDTL presence early in the evening, with the exception of troops leaving and entering their headquarters in Tasitolu in troop carriers. They appeared to be either going to or coming from the direction of Metinaro, where another headquarters is located. However, later in the evening

a number of Embassy sources reported seeing truckloads of FDTL members with automatic rifles cruising slowly in various neighborhoods of Dili. According to FDTL sources, these patrols are by regular FDTL forces, not the military police. Although there have been no confirmed FDTL operations today, there remains some concern that the continued involvement of the military, even if only in a standby capacity, may mean that their role in search and seizure operations is not over. Although GOET officials have justified the military presence by saying that it is designed to reassure the population of Dili, numerous Embassy sources report that it is having the opposite effect.

Official accounts of casualties and detentions are moderate, but rumors abound

16. The Embassy is continuing to work to obtain a complete and accurate accounting of deaths and injuries that have resulted from the disturbances and the military and police responses. According to the Government and FDTL, there have been only two confirmed deaths and about 60 injuries. However, this number does not include the three additional deaths reported by an FDTL colonel yesterday (see Reftel B). A source at the national hospital reported the same numbers, noting that they were treating about 60 injured, 15 of which were gunshot wounds with one of the injured is in critical condition. Also, there are many rumors of greater numbers killed, ranging from 20 to 50. People are particularly suspicious of the fact that the FDTL closed all access to Tasitolu for over 24 hours --- even denying President Xanana Gusmao access to their compound when he arrived yesterday afternoon without having given advance notice --- and many Dili residents believe that this was in order to clear out bodies. Worryingly, Lieutenant Commander Falur, when asked about these rumors, did not deny them outright but rather noted that he could not comment further. However, Foreign Minister Ramos Horta called Ambassador Rees tonight to say that he has spoken with Brigadier General Taur Matan Ruak, the commander of FDTL, who has thoroughly investigated the rumors and knows them to be false. According to Ramos Horta, Ambassador will be invited tomorrow to inspect the location where the bodies were supposedly being hidden. The identities of the dead and injured also remain unclear. No PNTL or FDTL are believed to have been killed, but there are several reports of police injuries. The identities of those killed have not been officially released,

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although they are generally believed to include two demonstrators who were killed in Dili during the Friday afternoon rioting and three who were killed later that afternoon in Tasitolu in a firefight with FDTL.

17. We are also working to confirm the numbers and identities of people detained. The latest official numbers are a total of 86, 10 of whom are dismissed soldiers. All detainees are reported to be in regular police custody and FDTL sources state that they have been immediately handing over anyone they detain to the police. One FDTL source estimated the number of people captured by the military and then turned over to the police to be around 150. However, a source in the UN Human Rights Unit expressed worry that the FDTL may be holding people in unknown locations. The Embassy has not been able to assess the credibility of this concern so far. Also, access to the detainees was initially denied to the UN Human Rights Unit, but they were later notified that access would be granted and at time of writing had a team visiting detainees. The Office of the Provedor (ombudsman) also reports to have been granted access and to have a team currently conducting visits. According to one senior UN source, the Provedor is accompanied by UN human rights officers during these visits to detainees.

Whereabouts of the dismissed soldiers remains unclear

18. Since Friday, it appears that the dismissed soldiers involved

in last week's demonstrations have dispersed. Various reports have come in regarding where they are currently located. A number of them are reported to be in hiding out in fear of arrest or retribution by the FDTL. Embassy staff visiting one of the Church sites where people have taken refuge were told that ten of the dismissed soldiers had taken refuge there and were being hidden and protected. Although Church officials initially did not inform authorities regarding their presence, the parish priest at the site stated that Lieutenant Colonel Falur is now aware they are there but has promised to not take action to detain them. Over the course of the weekend three of the dismissed soldiers presented themselves at the Embassy seeking refuge and were escorted away from the Embassy. Embassies have also heard that some dismissed soldiers currently in hiding are making inquiries regarding how to come out of hiding and turn themselves in safely.

Climate of fear persists and thousands of people still refuse to return home

¶9. Although there are no longer any people seeking refuge at the Embassy (see Ref A), and the last 20 or so people who had been in the Embassy compound left late this afternoon, thousands are still being sheltered by the Catholic Church and in other locations in various parts of the city. The largest site so far appears to be the Don Bosco Center, a church facility in Comoro. Embassy staff visiting late this afternoon estimated there are about 5,000 people there, mostly from adjacent neighborhoods. When queried, many were concerned about FDTL presence in their neighborhoods, and none were aware that the FDTL had been ordered to stand down from further law enforcement activity. A severe lack of access to up-to-date information appears to have severely compounded their sense of fear and uncertainty. In addition, about 250 people have taken refuge in the FDTL compound in Tasitolu and several among them reported to Embassy staff that their houses had been burned down. (See paragraph 3). Embassy staff also saw several large trucks full of people and their belongings heading out of Dili shortly before nightfall.

¶10. Toward the end of the day, the level of fear began to increase again. At the time of writing, we are hearing several reports that people are afraid of actions allegedly planned this evening in their neighborhoods and are therefore clearing out. One Embassy staff member reported that his neighborhood has emptied because they were told by police that the FDTL would be conducting a major operation there this evening. Another staff member heard from neighbors that "Lorosa'e" (eastern) people plan to launch an attack there this evening against the "Loromonu" (western) residents. Most Embassy sources believe these rumors to be false, perhaps perpetrated by people who plan to rob the vacant houses of those who flee in panic, but the

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highly visible presence of FDTL patrols with automatic weapons in various parts of the city has made it difficult to convince people that the rumors are without foundation.
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